Integration of New Touristic Buildings Planned to take Place in Sites with Natural, Historic and Cultural Values: The Case of Aegean Region in Turkiye

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Besides its natural beauties and favourable climate, the Aegean Region in Turkiye has a very rich historical past. Through many centuries ancient civilisations flourished in this area. These civilisations have left relics of their existence throughout the entire Aegean Region. It is the memory of these civilisations that makes this area such an important historical site. The Aegean Region has the potential to be a great attraction both historically and culturally, in Turkiye and all of the World.

After the law in 1982 encouraging tourism, both the state and the private sector made many important investments in tourism, and this led to the construction of a large number of touristic settlements in Turkiye. There is a common belief that in 2000's tourism will become the biggest industry in the World. As for today there exist countries of which the tourism makes up the principal source of income.

Although it seems positive to apply policies in a hurry to reach the world countries in tourism, it has disadvantages as to blemish the environment by means of unsuitable buildings. When dealing with a naturally beautiful area such as the Aegean Region, the integration of new elements become a very difficult task. To design new buildings that do not disturb the natural and historical beauty of the area is an extreme challenge.

Despite being a developing country, which provides us the opportunity of watching the mistakes previously committed by developed countries in tourism, it is not easy to say that we have made the necessary profit out of this chance.

Even if only on economical basis, it is obvious that our country is in need of tourism which constitutes 17% of our total export income. As a result of our tourism policies which are directed mainly to "mass-tourism" approximately 50% of the tourists who visit Turkiye come with tours organised abroad, and therefore 30% to 55% of the total expenditures of each tourist who come to our country goes to the tour operators in other countries.

When we look at the subject in a general way it will be observed that, although our country undertakes the most costly and risky investments such as infra-structures, touristic developments and other arrangements for the physical environment, the target we have chosen constitutes only a minor part of the total touristic income. Consequently, in the 80's, our touristic income has not increased proportionately to the increasing number of tourists visiting Turkiye.

All these observations give the impression that, as of today, we have not yet achieved our expectations in tourism. On the other hand, our loss is, and will continue to be, if matters evolve in the same way, that the natural, historical and cultural values which have taken thousands of years to develop, are greatly ruined and blemished for the sake of tourism industry.

It is interesting to note that both our own people and our guests who come to

see and enjoy these values are not happy to see this result, however the unlucky situation, which everyone complains of, still continues to exist. This mentality and approach is quite incomprehensible.

It is important that we first understand the environmental values and the function of tourism well enough, in order to protect effectively these natural, historical and cultural values, which fall under our responsibility and continue to use them as a lasting potential in tourism.

The fact that only 30% of our population has ever ventured out of their immediate territory shows that the inclination to be "tourists" is not very wide spread in Turkiye. On the other hand having chosen "mass-tourism" instead of "independent tourists" have resulted in large touristic establishments instead of "family scale managements".

It is a fact that tourism is an industry which we, as a community, do not know and not ready to undertake the tasks very well. It is not easy to foresee the dynamic future of the tourism versus technology and growing progress of the country. What we are offering to the service of the tourism is our historical, natural and cultural heritages which had been made up of thousands of years. These heritages are not the kind of those which could be spent generously. In fact it is not an "heritage" but a "consign" which we should carefully protect and handle to the future generations. This should be our national concern.

It is clear that we are aiming the international tourists for the touristic investments, which brings together the idea of constructing resort complexes for them. What are the expectations of the tourists coming to Aegean region and what we are offering to them as an "aegean image"?

Is it to transform a nature with exceptional beauties to a forest of concrete for the sake of environmental planning? Or building row dormitories on the sea shore?

Within its natural context the Aegean character is reflected on the buildings. This is the accumulation of thousands of years. These examples are humanistic in scale, reflecting the traditional way of living, constructed with local materials, open to the cooling breeze of aegean sea and so on.

It is not easy to say that in the design of contemporary touristic buildings, these living examples, which are in accordance with the natural and man-made environment, are taken into consideration for the planning of new buildings. To repeat the traditional details and elements on any kind of building is a common approach for the sake of "environmental building".

In Aegean region touristic buildings accomplished or under construction, are at least three star hotels, their programms are over charged and consequently they are huge buildings in appearance.

These kind of buildings are in contradiction with the natural and man-made environment because of the number of people they accommodate. The natural environment is not ready to assimilate such a physical hugeness and such a crowd, and also we are not ready to organise the services of such a complex system. From their part these buildings are far from reflecting the existing Aegean image.

The "traditional hospitality" of the Turkish people, which might have been an important factor in our tourism, has stayed only as a neglected and unused potential. In most cases, the western implementations have been imitated as good examples without taking into consideration our own environmental values and realities. As a result, a "guest room" with superficial qualities has been created instead of a real environment, alive and realistic.

The "guest room" of the Turkish house of the recent past, but now no longer in use, was the best room of the house which was used by the family only when they welcomed their guests. This

room, which also looked like a show-room where the best furniture and household valuables were on display, was never used by the family. Therefore, the room was as strange to the family members as to the guests and it did not reflect the true face of the family who owned it. The room served for two purposes, firstly for honouring the guests by welcoming them in a special room which was never used daily for ordinary purposes and secondly for showing off to the guests the best of their possessions which in reality, did not reflect the real characteristics of the family owning it.

In short, this room, which did not take its place in the daily life of its owners, was an alien physical surrounding for the family as well.

Nowadays, also because of economical problems, there is a growing tendency to welcome our guests where the family lives its daily life, surrounded by furniture which is not for show off but for real use. These "living rooms" reflect the true face of the family and are warmer, more welcoming and true-to-fact physical surrounding for the guests and the visitors.

This "guest room" mentality which we apply also to our tourism policy has caused us to lose most of our local values. To correct and not to repeat the same mistakes thus made, we have to abandon to imitate the "guest room" mentality.

Such an approach would enable us to reach the desired level in the world of tourism with our true image which is colourful, hospitable and warm.

Therefore, developing realistic living environments and bringing them up to the level of welcoming guests instead of building unrealistic and imitation "guest rooms" in the name of tourism shall be more healthy and a profitable approach, both for the local people and the national economy.

It is very difficult to find a solution to revitalize the environment already spoiled by non conforming buildings in Aegean region, from the point of view of physical and natural aspects. But at least we should not repeat the same mistakes in similar implementations. To this aim I think that we must quit the old concept of "guest room" in planning principles.

We might add a contemporary context to Aegean region by a design concept which would reflect our national, cultural particularities and which would protect our environmental values. Such an approach could place us on a higher rank within the world of tourism, by our true image.

When planning a touristic building in such an environment, an analysis of the natural and man made environment is of prime importance for a successful planning, even before the architect's interference. After that the design should be prepared by a team of architects, city planners, landscape architects and engineers on different branches. The end-product should be presented to the approval of the authorities and local people who are the real owners of the region.